Reservoir Angling in the Hells Canyon Complex

Technical Report E.5-10

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1. INTRODUCTION

There is a concern that current operations may be having a negative effect upon the recreational fishing opportunities. Therefore, data pertaining to angler effort, catch-rates, and harvest associated with the HCC are needed to evaluate the situation. Creel surveys were conducted at the HCC reservoirs from 1994 through 1998 and in 2000. Information reported includes location, timing, and amount of angling use, as well as target species, catch and harvest rates, and length-frequency of harvested fish.

2. CONCLUSIONS

Pg. 57 – "Results from the creel survey conducted by IDFG and ODFW in 1989 …indicate that the catch of crappie during that year was much higher than any catch we recorded during our study years…. This period of phenomenal crappie angling was **probably caused** by a series of drought years that allowed juvenile crappie to accumulate in the system instead of being flushed out by high flows (Richter 2001)."

BLM feels more information is needed to draw a conclusion. Changes during the study period are nothing compared to changes pre and post study. What is the basis of the statement that crappie populations are driven more by drought conditions rather than reservoir fluctuation levels and timing? Is the Richter study by an IPC employee? Are there any independent sources that could verify this hypothesis? Was it purely coincidental that in 2001 and 2002 when IPC did not participate in the "fish flush" program that the crappie population immediately skyrocketed again? Refer to aquatics study review to assess impacts of crappie spawn and the impacts of reservoir refill. If the reservoir is down when the crappie spawn and the reservoir refills covering the eggs with many feet of cold water, the impacts on crappie survival is significant.

Pg. 57 – "The study efforts described in this report began in 1994 when the "crappiethon" was over. A few large crappie were still being caught but not nearly the number seen in previous years."

BLM agrees. This is the crux of the problem with all of the recreation studies. The data was not collected during a representative period over the life of the license. Conclusions are based on the lowest use cycle. Conclusions that would drive appropriate PM&Es should be drawn from a cycle that would reflect more of a worse

case scenario. Actually, there are very few conclusions drawn in this report. It is more a summarization of the data only.

Pg. 55 – "Many of the anglers who come to Hells Canyon and Oxbow Reservoirs are there primarily to fish, but they are also happy to be in the beautiful area, and they consider catching "a bucket of fish" a bonus. Although many of the anglers at Brownlee Reservoir also enjoy the surroundings, these anglers are more likely to be "meat fishing."

BLM disagrees. This is a subjective guess. It may or may not reflect the current conditions, but if reservoir management changed, would the current attitudes remain the same? I doubt it. In other words, if Brownlee did not suffer from "yucky" water, it would make an excellent water skiing body of water. Then "meat fishing" would not be so prevalent.

Pg. 56 – "Downstream of this area [Pine Creek], a series of dispersed sites are located on the Homestead Road on the Oregon side of Hells Canyon Reservoir. Because a large amount of bank angling occurs in this area, these sites provide day-use and camping areas for large numbers of anglers."

BLM agrees. The unstated conclusion should then indicate: Are we providing the facilities to serve these users? Since the reservoirs attract the anglers, IPC should share a greater share of the maintenance on the Homestead Rd.

Pg. 57 – "Both estimates of hours of effort are probably fairly accurate; the main difference in results between the two years is that the 1989 effort resulted in an estimated warm-season crappie catch of 1,937,513; our 1994 effort resulted in an estimated warm-season crappie catch of 684,481."

In other words, '89 and '94 received about the same amount of fishing pressure but almost twice the crappie were caught in '89. I am surprised that the two years received nearly the same amount of fishing. Observations and campground receipts would indicate many more people were in the area in '89. This inconsistency may indicate a study bias and/or inaccuracy.

Pg. 58 – "While the percentage of anglers targeting catfish increased considerably from the 1989 survey, this increase is probably the result of large decreases in the number of anglers targeting crappie and the number of anglers changing target species."

BLM agrees. In other words, prior to the study period, crappie were the primary target fish. When the crappie population disappeared, the few remaining anglers turned their attention to other species, primarily catfish. Again, this may not be a representative time period from which to draw conclusions. Through the life of the license fish populations are due to vary. Therefore, I would ask the questions: Do

the changes in target species drive a need for varying facilities? Do different user groups have different needs and wants? IPC studies should answer these questions.

Pg. 54 – "Although many types of recreation occur in the HCC reservoir areas, all of them important to those who participate, angling attracts more recreationists than any other activity…. Many changes in angling success occurred in the HCC during the study period. These changes influenced how many and what type of anglers came to the area"

BLM agrees. The tie to this conclusion is that land managers need to provide facilities that meet the needs of anglers that change over time. How many anglers, and what type of anglers, drive what facilities are required. The proposed Adaptive Management Plan is essential to implement and monitor the changes over time.

Pg. 56 – "Boat anglers vary from too many people in one small boat fishing for "anything" to bass anglers in $20,000 bass boats with all of the most modern angling technology."

Amen! This statement is indicative of the problems facing land managers. It identifies the problem but does not go forward with offering a solution. This type of statement only indirectly suggests appropriate PM&Es.

Pg. 59 – "Some reduction in targeted effort for bass probably occurred because anglers had trouble launching boats during extreme drawdowns."

BLM agrees. This simple statement indicates a conclusion should be drawn that identifies that changes in drawdown require special facilities to accommodate user needs. Bass anglers are not as likely to launch their $20,000 boats from a rocky unimproved ramp that is only accessible over a rough, gravel road. They need a quality concrete ramp that is designed to meet varying drawdown levels. A high quality road must access this ramp.

3. STUDY ADEQUACY

This study is inadequate because it did not take into account variations in amount and type of user over the life of a license. The study period, 1994-2000, is a small sampling of the angling activity on the three reservoirs. Reference was made to prior studies conducted by other agencies. However, the effort was minimal.

The study is not complete because it did not draw conclusions that would be helpful in identifying appropriate PM&E measures. It merely summarized the data collected. It did not draw any conclusions regarding facility needs of the anglers, fishery management needs, water quality needs, economic opportunities for adjoining communities, access needs, etc.

There is no assessment of what the project impacts have been on the anglers. Inferences only have been made to drawdowns and the resultant inability to launch boats and that drawdowns are not the cause of the dramatic reduction in crappie populations. It does not address the question of how project operations impact anglers, their experiences, or their needs.

4. BLM CONCLUSIONS AND RECCOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS:

This study is adequate for as far as it goes. However, it is not reflective of the situation over time. The data was collected over a very short time period in relationship to the life of a license. It does display that the numbers and types of users do change with varying conditions. It does not come to any conclusions based on the collected data. It does not project future use or demands through the license period that is being applied for.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Study should seriously document impacts of reservoir fluctuations on warm water fisheries. It should determine the optimum project operations possible to maximize warm water fisheries with other resource needs.
- Study analysis should not be limited to data collections from 1994 through 1998 and 2000. Since angling has varied widely over the life of the license, a broad timeframe should be analyzed.
- The study should identify how anglers access the reservoir waters and determine what IPC's responsibility is in funding maintenance of that access.
- The study should identify what facilities anglers need along the reservoir now and in the future. Is there a shortage of fish cleaning stations, need for more parking or launch sites, are overnight facilities adequate, are roads adequate, etc.? The number and type of user will dictate what is needed in any one area. Numbers should be assessed to reflect past, current, and future use levels.
- The study should document the economic impact of changes in angling activities on adjacent communities and counties.